

April 27, 2009

Dear Senator Reid and Representative Loebuck:

We, the undersigned education and advocacy organizations, want to thank you for introducing the Secondary School Innovation Fund Act. The legislation capitalizes on a unique American strength: the locally designed and driven innovation that has made our economy the largest in the world. Just as small businesses need venture capital to help their companies reach their full potential, local educational innovators need resources to invest in innovative practice, determine its impact, and replicate best practices. The Secondary School Innovation Fund Act will provide competitive grants for innovative models and programs in our nation's middle level and high schools that improve student achievement and prepare students for success in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Far too many students attend high schools where expectations are low, dropping out is the norm, and those who graduate leave unprepared for college and meaningful employment. This situation is untenable for individuals and our nation. The students who dropped out of the Class of 2008 will cost the economy an estimated \$319 billion in lost wages over the course of their lifetimes, and these non-graduates will earn an average of almost \$10,000 less each year compared to their peers who graduated. Since almost 90 percent of the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs require some postsecondary education, failing to improve our graduation rates means that U.S. students and the American economy will be unprepared to compete in the global economy.

This Secondary School Innovation Fund Act would give educational innovators, doing important work across the country, the opportunity to evaluate and expand upon their strategies for increasing student achievement and graduation rates. The Secondary School Innovation Fund Act would

- provide grants for partnerships between state education agencies or local education agencies with institutes of higher education, community based organizations, nonprofits, businesses, and school development organizations to create innovative models of reform in our nation's secondary schools;
- create evidence-based, systemic, and replicable models of reform in secondary schools that improve student achievement and prepare students to succeed in postsecondary education and the twenty-first-century workforce;
- provide resources necessary for high-quality research and evaluation to ensure that federal funding can be leveraged for programs with a proven track record in improving student achievement; and
- support a variety of models and strategies for innovation in secondary schools such as multiple pathways, personalization, early college and dual enrollment, early warning systems, career academies, improved transitions and alignment, expanded learning time, postsecondary and work-based learning opportunities, increased autonomy and flexibility at the school level, improved learning opportunities in rural schools, and increased rigor at all levels of secondary education aligned with postsecondary education and the workforce.

Thank you again for your leadership on this critical issue of improving our nation's secondary schools.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
ACT, Inc.
AcademyOne
AMSECS, LLC
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Women
ASCD
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association of School Business Officials International
Communities in Schools
Everyone Graduates Center
First Focus
Jobs for the Future
Knowledge Alliance
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Collaboration for Youth
National Education Association
National Middle School Association
NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
Perspectives, Inc.
Public Private Action
Questar Assessment, Inc.
Salvation Army
Talent Development Program
Voyager Expanded Learning

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